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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1741
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 0861
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 1498
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 0312
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1174
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 2198
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1489
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0554
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2625

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [FR](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: FRANCE CRITICIZE ARRESTS OF SYRIAN ACTIVISTS BUT

REFUSES PUBLIC SUPPORT OF SYRIAN NATIONAL COUNCIL

REF: 07 STATE 171106

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4. (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Post delivered reftel demarche to French MFA Syria desk officer Jean-Christophe Auge on January 14. He did not have an immediate response and stated he would have to get back to us. We used a January 17 meeting between visiting Deputy Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs Joseph Wood and French MFA DAS-equivalent Ludovic Pouille to request a response.

¶2. (C) Pouille referred to a statement made by the MFA press spokesperson January 14 criticizing the human rights situation in general and the recent wave of arrests of signatories to the Damascus Declaration. When we pressed specifically with respect to a public declaration of French support for the Syrian National Council or for Syrians to enjoy the right of free association, Pouille initially replied that France would not back a group calling for the overthrow of the Syrian regime. We countered that the Council was not seeking that per se but merely wishing to exercise the right to peaceful and legal dissent in opposition. Pouille stated that France supports legal dissent and was particularly mindful of the plight of opposition leader Riad Seif, whose poor health has prompted France, as de facto representative of the EU presidency in Damascus, to lead a joint diplomatic effort to allow him to seek medical treatment in France.

¶3. (U) Following is the embassy's informal translation of the Q and A that appeared in the transcript of the January 14 French MFA press briefing:

Q: A majority of European countries condemned the wave of arrests carried out by the Syrian authorities, affecting activists involved with the Damascus Declaration. I would like to know France's position in this matter, knowing that nine activists are still in prison, among them Madame Fida' Hurani, president of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration.

A: France is very concerned about the human rights situation in Syria, and in particular about the successive wave of arrests of several signatories to the Damascus Declaration.

As the European Union did in its statement of December 31, we call for their release and ask that Syria assure its respect

for freedom of expression in conformity with its international commitments.

End translation

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

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